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ABSTRACT

The New College Living-Learning Unit was begun in 1972-73 as an optional beginning semester for New College freshmen. The basis for the curriculum was taken from the regular freshman program at New College but given a 'unique' substance (the notion of community from a multiplicity of discipline perspectives) and unique physical facilities. The following report is an evaluation of the Living-Learning Unit for its second year of operation. Three faculty along with 52 students comprised the population of the unit. The curriculum for the program included a "core" course entitled "Being Human" that was required of all participants. In addition, six other courses were listed as part of the Unit, although students were not required to take any of these other courses. The primary concern of this evaluation was with the perceived value of the Living-Learning Unit and the "Being Human" course in particular. Two additional dimensions, the physical facilities provided for the program and the student's attitude toward this type of program in general, were also of major interest. In the eyes of the students responding to the Living-Learning Unit Questionnaire, the Unit appears to have failed to materialize as a cohesive, meaningful, learning experience. But it must be remembered that the views expressed in this report reflect only 40% of the participants and therefore may not be representive. The appendix contains the survey results. (Author/PG)

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AN EVALUATION OF THE "LIVING_LEARNING" UNIT:

NEW COLLEGE, 1973-74

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July, 1974
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AN EVALUATION OF THE "LIVING-LEARNING" UNIT: NEW COLLEGE, 1973-74

INTRODUCTION

The New College Living-Learning Unit was begun in 1972-73 as an optional beginning semester for New College freshman. The basis for the curriculum was taken from the regular freshman program at New College, but given a 'unique' substance - the notion of community from a multiplicity of disciplines perspectives - and unique physical facilities. A more detailed description of the program can be found in the New College special addendum describing the program.

The following report is an evaluation of the Living-Learning Unit for its second year of operation. Three faculty along with 52 students comprised the population of the unit. The curriculum for the program included a "core" course, entitled "Being Human", which was required of all participates. In addition, six other courses were listed as part of the Unit, although students were not required to take any of these other courses.

The primary concern of this evaluation was with (1) the perceived value of the Living-Learning Unit and the "Being Human" course in particular. Two additional dimensions, (2) the physical facilities provided for the program and (3) the student's attitude toward this type of program in general, were also of major interest.

PROCEDURES

Because no existing evaluation instrument was available, a 30 item questionaire was developed by the New College Educational Research Office with the help and cooperation of the three participating faculty in the Living-Learning Unit, (See Appendix B). Five of the 30 questions called for descriptive or factual responses, while the remaining 25 asked for a response based on a 9 point liker type scale. Polar terms differ from question to question and the dimensions are clearly indicated.

At the end of the Fall semester, all 52 participants were mailed the evaluation questionaire. A follow up mailing was completed approximately one month later in an attempt to obtain as large a sample as possible.

RESULTS

Of the 52 students in the Unit, 22 returned the questionaires. One of these 22 refused to respond so the effective response rate was 21 or 40%. Although this is a substantial number, it is clearly not the majority of students. The possibility exists that the respondents were self-selective in such a manner that only one portion of the spectrum of opinion was obtained. All results, as reported below and in Appendix A, must be considered in the light of this possible limitation.

RESULTS

Of the 21 respondents, 11 lived in the residence halls and 11 commuted to Hofstra. Of those students living in the residence halls, the majority were males (N=8). Only the male students lived in the accommadations set aside for the Living-Learning Unit. The female resident students were housed in the regular dormitories with other Hofstra students. In this sense the Living Learning Unit was not centrally housed in one dormitory as it had been in the previous year.

The commuting students lived an average of 23 miles from the campus and were predominately female (N=9).

Questions 5 and 6 attempted to determine to what extent the students had taken sufficient courses in the Unit to be considered a part of that program as opposed to only taking the "Being Human" course. Fifty percent of the students responding took only the "Being Human" course. Of the remaining 11, five students took only 2 of the six courses offered in the program and 6 took only one of the six courses offered. In essence, of the respondents, most were not effectively involved in the Unit other than being members of the "Being Human" course.

Appendix A shows the mean values of the responses for each of the quantititive question on the questionaire. In each case the question is repeated, with the dimentionality of the scale indicated on the left immediately below the question, and the number of respondents and the mean value to the right. In each case the midpoint value on the scales is 5, but the reader should carefully note the directionality of the scale before interpreting results.

In an attempt to summarize these results, it would appear that, in general, the students liked the "idea" of the program, found that they were able to meet other student more easily, that a sense of community was more or less present, and that the mix of commuters and resident students was desirable. Most felt that if the program were to be offered again, more emphasis should be placed on social functions and that field experiences should be continued. In terms of the physical facilities, the sense was that students were not satisfied with the facilities (i.e. the "Mods"). One interesting contradition that can be found in the results is that while many of the students felt that the program should be offered again, many also indicated that they would not enroll in such a program again if they had the choice.

Of all aspects of the program, the "Being Human" course itself was the most negatively rated. Many students were "upset" by the course, did not find it particularly useful or personaly enlightenting. One of the major problems seems to be the size of the class which was considered much too large.

Many of the respondents included detailed written comments in addition to responses to the scaled questions. Some of the comments suggest that while the program facilitated interpersonal relationships, the "Being Human" course was criticized for its size and its apparent disorganization and lack of substance.

In general, these student respondents expressed a personal lack of involvement in the Unit and number of students commented that the Unit, as such, "did not exist".

SUMMARY

In the eyes of those students responding to the Living-Learning Unit questionaire, the Unit appears to have failed to materialize as a cohesive, meaningful learning experience. Reasons for this failure appear to be: (1) a minimal number of resident students were involved and the living arrangements were not consistent with the "advertized" idea that students in the program would be living together, co-educationally, in a facility designated and designed for the program; (2) the majority of students responding did not participate in the other courses identified as part of the Unit, consequently the Unit was essentially identified by most of them as the "Being Human" course; (3) since the "Being Human" course was perceived variously as unstructured, confusing, and meaningless, the most positive aspect of the Unit proved to the facilitation of interpersonal relationships, but even this was hindered by the perceived lack of "social" activities. It must be remembered that the views expressed in this report represent only 40% of the participants and therefore may not be representative.

With these results in mind, some recommendations appear to be in order. First, if it is to be a Living and Learning Unit, perhaps more emphasis should be placed on this program for resident students. Similarly, the facilities should be coeducational and an emphasis on extra-curricular learning as well as classroom learing would appear to be desirable. Along with greater cohesiveness encouraged through living together, students who opt for the program should be encouraged to participate in more of the courses assigned to the unit; perhaps the students should be given less options in their choice of courses.

Appendix A

NEW COLLEGE OF HOFSTRA

Living-Learning/Being Human

	NUMBER OF RESPONSE	MEAN VALUE
7. Would you, if you could relive the fall term, choose the Living-Learning Program again?		
definitely choose-definitely avoid	20	5.9
8. Do you consider yourself as being an open, outgoing person or a rather timid, shy person when you first came to Hofstra?		
very open-very timid	21	4.4
9. Did the Living-Learning Program make you more or less open?		
much more open-much more withdrawn	20	4.4
10. Do you feel you have more or less understanding of people as a result of having taken the Living-Learning Program rather than the same amount of study/courses in the regular part of New College?		
much more understanding-much less understanding	19	3.5
11. Do you feel you developed more friends at Hofstra because you were part of the Living-Learning Program?		
many more friends-many less friends	20	4.2
12. Do you feel that you developed more meaningful/deeper friendships at Hofstra because you were part of the Living-Learning Program?		
more meaningful-less meaningful	19	4.4
13. Did the location of the Program (in the Mods) help or hinder your adjustment to College?		
very helpful-hindered greatly	20	5.5
14. Should a program such as this mix dorm and commuter students?		
definately-absolutely not	20	3.8
15. Did the fact that the faculty advisors had offices in the Mods, near the classes, make advisement easier or more effective?		
helped substantially-hindered greatly	20	4.8
16. Should this Program have social functions such as dinners, evening meetings, weekend affairs etc?		
yes, many (4-5)-no,none	19	2.5

NEW COLLEGE OF HOFSTRA
Living-Learning/Being Human

17. Did the parameters of the Program, ie. grouping in the Mods, a core of courses, and a small number of faculty members, help to develope a feeling of continuity in your college studies?

	NUMBER OF RESPONSE	MEAN VALUE
helped substantially-hindered	20	4.8

18. How do you rate the physical facilities for the Living-Learning Program?

excellent-very poor	20	6.3

21. Should field experiences continue to be offered?

definitely continue-eliminate them	8	1.8

22. Should the Living-Learning Program be offered again in the fall for next year's students?

definitely yes-definately no	20	3.3

23. Was the Being-Human course different from other courses?

very different-no different	20	3.0

24. Did the Being-Human Course help you to relate better to people?

very helpful-no help at all	20	6.7

25. At anytime during the Being-Human Course did you feel upset about what was going on?

upset a lot by course-not upset at all by course	20	3.8

26. Did you personally change because of your upset?

changed greatly-didn't change	19	6.0

27. Was your self-awareness heightened as a result of the Course?

greatly heightened-no effect	20	6.8

28. Did the Being-Human Course help you to learn how to work out relationships with other people?

great help-no help at all	20	7.5

29. Was the size of the class too large or too small?

much too large-much too small	20	2.1

30. Was the content/subject of the course worthwhile?

very worthwhile-useless	20	5.5